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Paul Anthony Marshall

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Abstract

The aim of this research project was to investigate the cultural identity of mixed ethnicity Japanese-Brazilians, of which there are a minimum of 1.9 million worldwide (The Association of Nikkei and Japanese Abroad, n. d.). An online questionnaire was used to inquire about situations and opinions concerning cultural identity. It also aimed to identify the types of problems that mixed Japanese-Brazilian individuals have when attempting to assimilate into one of these cultures. Japanese-Brazilians in both Japan and Brazil participated in the study. The results exposed a multitude of positive and negative aspects of living as a bicultural individual and provided valuable insights into situations and opinions.

Keywords : Japan ; Brazil ; cultural identity ; ethnicity ; bi-cultural ;
bi-ethnic.

Introduction and Background

Historically, Japan has been one of the most culturally homogenous countries in the world, even spending around two hundred and twenty years voluntarily cut off from the rest of the world under the Tokugawa shogunate. During this period, which was a reaction to the influx of Christian missionaries, westerners were not allowed to enter Japan, and normal Japanese citizens were not allowed to leave (Laver, 2011). On a national level Japan has extremely low immigration and continuously refuses to accept international refugees displaced by conflicts such as the current one in Syria. However, some would say that if Japan really wants to

compete on a global scale again, a loosening of their very restrictive immigration policies is a necessary step. This may be particularly significant during the current period of ‘the aging population’ where Japan’s workforce is struggling to support the increasing number of retirees.

Brazil is a geographically enormous country of a similar size to China and the contiguous United States, with over 200 million citizens. In stark contrast to Japan’s aging population, 62% of Brazilians are under 29 years old. The most recent census in Brazil, which took place in 2010, revealed that 48% consider themselves white, 44% consider themselves brown, and 7% consider themselves black. Just 0.5% considered themselves yellow and 0.25% claimed to be indigenous. (<http://worldpopulationreview.com/countries/brazil-population/>) So, in terms of the age distribution of citizens, and in terms of racial variety, Brazil and Japan are polar opposites. Other stark contrasts exist in religion, crime rate, and GDP, among many other factors.

The Japanese in general are known for being reserved, considered, and controlled, whereas Brazilians are often thought of as sociable, outgoing, energetic, musical, and physical. Of course, Brazil is a particularly huge country with an amazing array of ethnic groups which cannot be stereotyped. However, if these stereotypes are even partially true, there must exist a great gulf in understanding between individuals who grow up in each of these cultures.

Japan and Brazil are two countries which are not only incredibly far away from each other geographically, but they are also culturally very different. Despite this, the largest Japanese community outside of Japan, is in Sao Paulo, Brazil, with around 665,000 residents (World Population Review, n.d.). Also, one of the largest groups of foreigners in Japan is those of Brazilian origin, with around 170,000 (E-Stat Portal of Official Statistics of Japan, n.d.). It seems unlikely that two countries such as these would find themselves with such close ties.

The Japanese diaspora, also known as *nikkeijin*, are a population of Japanese citizens who migrated abroad. The majority left Japan after the self-imposed period of isolation ended with the Meiji restoration in 1868, while the largest migration to Brazil began in 1908 (<http://worldpopulationreview.com/world-cities/sao-paulo-population/>) and increased in number when the United States introduced the Immigration Act in 1921, which reduced the ease with which Japanese could migrate to the U. S. (Franco, 1996). From then until shortly after the end of World War Two, a large number of Japanese moved overseas due to the terrible economic conditions brought on by war. The total number of *nikkeijin* worldwide, is in the millions (<http://www.jadesas.or.jp/en/aboutnikkei/index.html>). Some of these people have now returned to Japan.

These days the number of mixed-culture marriages in Japan is slowly growing (<https://www.nippon.com/en/features/h00096/>) and this of course is producing an increasing number of children who are half- or partially-Japanese. Many of these mixed-nationality individuals will also have moved from one country to another ; often from one side of the world to the other. This sort of experience can be disorientating for the individual in terms of their cultural identity.

Despite this large number of mixed-culture individuals, relatively little is known about the difficulties that they face due to their unique situations. The uniqueness of Japanese culture means that anyone who grows up partially-Japanese, depending on the circumstances of their upbringing, could experience confusion as to where their cultural identity lies. They could potentially have difficulty fitting in to Japanese society, or having left Japan, fitting in to a different society.

Biculturalism has received quite a large amount of attention among Psychology researchers in recent years. A new field of research has even been created. ‘Critical Mixed Race Studies’ (CMRS) has already seen studies into Korean Americans, Mexican Americans, and other bicultural individuals. This is due to

biculturalism becoming an increasingly common phenomenon all over the world. Of course, the vast majority of the research has been conducted in countries with high levels of immigration and biculturalism such as the United States and the United Kingdom. Much less research has been conducted into biculturalism in Japan, where even though it is relatively less common, it is becoming an undeniable part of society. What's more, "cross cultural psychologists take seriously the view that findings from research in one culture area of the world (or even in a few societies) cannot be generalized to others." (Berry, 2005)

What is cultural identity ?

Acculturation can be defined as 'dealing with' existing in a bicultural or multicultural situation, whether being born a mixed-culture individual, or simply by living in a culture which is different to the one you are from or used to, or "the process of learning and adapting to a new culture" (Berry, 2003). The culture(s) that an individual feels an attachment to constitutes a cultural identity.

...an individual who has been exposed to and has learned more than one culture is a multicultural person, but only when this individual expresses an attachment with and loyalty to these cultures can we say that the individual has a multicultural identity.

(Nguyen & Benet-Martinez, 2010, p 5)

According to Berry (2003), acculturation is the use of one of four strategies which involve varying degrees of 'attachment' or 'loyalty' to the majority, or 'surrounding' culture, and/or to the minority culture. The first strategy, assimilation, involves complete acceptance of, and immersion into the majority culture. Biculturalism, or integration, is an even interaction and identification with

both the majority and minority cultures. Separation is identifying only with the minority culture, while marginalization is refusing, or being unable to identify with either culture. The strategy an individual adopts will eventually dictate the individual's cultural identity.

What issues do bicultural individuals have in discovering their cultural identity ?

Individuals who are 'between' cultures experience five stages of development : personal identity, choice of group categorization, enmeshment/denial, appreciation, and integration (Poston, 1990). According to this theory, all of these stages contribute to and help the individual to arrive at their own unique cultural identity. The form of cultural identity arrived at by the end of these stages could be one of the four mentioned previously, which were hypothesized by Berry (2003).

It seems that some bicultural individuals tend to experience a potentially stressful and cumbersome psychological journey before arriving at their cultural identity, which in itself may not be particularly comforting or conclusive.

Despite the many hypotheses on biculturalism, and studies of various groups in the United States and elsewhere, there are very few actual studies of biculturalism in Japan available and easily accessible in the literature in English. It is quite probable that this is due to the fact that any studies into this bicultural group would most likely be published in either Japanese or Portuguese.

In one study, however, Oikawa & Yoshida (2007) used focus groups of four to five participants. These groups were deliberately chosen in order to be as homogenous as possible. According to Krueger & Casey's (2000) hypothesis, this tends to put participants at ease and encourages them to open up more and to discuss their true feelings. Although Oikawa & Yoshida's (2007) study yielded interesting and useful insights into what it is like to grow up as a bi-ethnic individual in Tokyo, a study which compares and contrasts the experiences of Brazilian-

Japanese individuals in Japan with those in Brazil ought to shed more light on the influence of the majority culture, and on the effects of moving from one culture to another.

What research methods did the literature review recommend ?

Oikawa & Yoshida (2007) used focus groups to good effect to access in-depth personal opinions and feelings from bi-ethnic individuals. However, this would be a very time-consuming and expensive method to use for a Japan / Brazil comparison. Also, some participants may be more likely to give their true opinions when working alone and writing personal experiences and feelings down rather than discussing them verbally in front of a group.

Ward & Kus, (2012) used anonymous surveys as their research method to collect data in New Zealand from 289 immigrants about their attitudes and self-reported behaviours. Their quantitative analysis of immigrants' responses divided them into Berry's four categories of acculturation. Over 60% were judged to be integrated, while just 3.5% were marginalized. Surveys such as this allow large numbers of people to respond in a short time. Furthermore, online surveys allow a large number of participants to be questioned in a short time without any geographical restrictions.

Research Questions

What culture do Japanese-Brazilians in Japan identify with most readily ?

What culture do Japanese-Brazilians in Brazil identify with most readily ?

What aspects of the culture do Japanese-Brazilians in Japan have problems with ?

What aspects of the culture do Japanese-Brazilians in Brazil have problems with ?

Participants

Four of the seven questions in the online survey dealt with personal information. Ten of the nineteen participants in this study were of Japanese-Brazilian culture, living in Shizuoka or Aichi. The other nine participants were of Japanese-Brazilian culture and living in Brazil ; mostly in São Paulo. Participants were not asked their name, age or gender.

There were a wide range of cultural mixes among the individuals. In Brazil, three individuals stated that they were 100% Japanese, two were 75% Japanese, one 50/50, one 60/40, and one unspecified percentage of Brazilian-Japanese mixed ethnicity. Finally, one individual was a 25% mix of four different ethnicities : 25% indigenous, 25% Italian and 25% German in ethnicity, with the remaining 25% being Japanese.

Among the Japanese-Brazilians living in Japan, two individuals were 100% Japanese, three were 75% Japanese, two were 50% Japanese, and three were 25% Japanese. Eight out of the ten people did not mention Brazil in their ethnic description. However, they did mention sub-divisions of their previous origins instead. It is not known whether this means that individuals identify more with those previous origins, or whether they were aiming to be as specific as possible in their ethnic descriptions. Within this 'Brazilian nationality', there was one individual who was 25% African, 25% Portuguese, 25% German in ethnicity. Another was 25% Italian and 25% Brazilian. One individual identified as being 50% Serbian, and another as 25% Indigenous, 25% Italian and 25% Spanish.

When the 19 participants were asked which generation of their families had migrated abroad, 3 said their great-grandparents, 8 said grandparents, 8 said parents, and none of them said that they had personally migrated.

When asked how long they had lived in Japan, and how long they had lived in

Brazil, those currently living in *Brazil* had been there from 26 years to 8 months, and had spent from zero to 22 years in Japan.

When asked how long they had lived in Japan, and how long they had lived in Brazil, those currently living in *Japan* had been there from 3 years to ‘whole life’, and had spent from zero to 25 years in Brazil.

Methodology

The survey consisted of just seven questions. These were designed to be concise and to the point (Appendix 1). The explanation, instructions and questions were written with the upmost effort to avoid any leading or biased wording. The four questions which asked about personal details, such as country of residence, were multiple-choice. For the three questions which asked for opinions, participants were invited to type their unrestricted answers in order to allow a full range of qualitative responses. This approach was used because the study was exploratory in nature ; it was thought that important themes could emerge and be identified from participants’ responses.

The explanation, instructions, and questions were translated from English into Portuguese by a Brazilian native-Portuguese speaker who also has a high competence in English. The Portuguese explanation, instructions and questions can be seen in Appendix 2. A survey which included these seven questions in Portuguese was then created on the Survey Monkey website (n. d.).

Participants were contacted via email and/or social networking sites, and were family members, friends, or acquaintances of various Japanese-Brazilian contacts that the researcher and/or the translator had in Japan and Brazil.

Responses were then finally translated by the same Brazilian native-Portuguese speaker back into English for analysis by the researcher.

Results

The results of this study will be divided according to the research questions.

What culture do Japanese-Brazilians in Japan identify with most readily ?

Of the individuals currently living in Japan, five of them said that they feel most comfortable in Japan, while three of them feel more comfortable in Brazil, and one in Australia.

What culture do Japanese-Brazilians in Brazil identify with most readily ?

Of the individuals currently living in Brazil, four of them said that they feel most comfortable in Japan, two said Brazil, one said ‘both’, and one said ‘both and neither’.

What aspects of the culture do Japanese-Brazilians in Japan have problems with ?

The final two questions of the survey tried to elicit specific examples of the difficulties that individuals encounter when moving from Japan to Brazil or from Brazil to Japan.

Regarding settling in Japan, the most common difficulty mentioned was language ; five participants recalled having problems with this at some point. In addition to this, some of the other difficulties mentioned could be interpreted as also stemming from language : one person mentioned ‘getting jobs’ and ‘signing contracts’. Four people mentioned ‘morality’ as a significant problem. The third most noticeable group of difficulties for settling in Japan, mentioned by three individuals, was bullying / prejudice / acceptance. Several ‘national characteristics’

were mentioned as being difficult to deal with ; ‘submissiveness of women’, ‘meticulousness’, ‘lack of sarcasm’, ‘lack of warmth’ ‘hard to make friends’ and ‘quietness’. Finally, ‘food’, ‘education’, and ‘tattoos’ were each mentioned by one respondent. One respondent said that they had had no problem settling in Japan after arriving from Brazil.

What aspects of the culture do Japanese-Brazilians in Brazil have problems with ?

Regarding difficulties in settling in Brazil, language was mentioned by four respondents. ‘Acceptance’ or ‘racism’ was mentioned by five people in total. Five people also pointed to ‘morality’, ‘manners’, ‘respect’ or ‘discipline’, while three people thought that ‘education’ was the largest problem. Finally, ‘way of being’, ‘gesticulations’ and ‘imprudent people’ were each mentioned by one respondent each.

Limitations

Firstly, the low number of respondents means that the generalizability of this study is very limited. A large-scale online survey could be much more insightful.

The survey questions were only available in Portuguese. Had they been offered in Japanese too, it is possible that more Japanese Brazilians would have responded and this could have particularly encouraged responses from individuals who are more comfortable with the Japanese aspect of their biculturalism.

The final two questions could have been worded more cleverly to avoid overlap in the answers given, or to elicit possible reasons for the difficulties mentioned.

Focus groups, such as in the research project mentioned previously by Oikawa & Yoshida (2007), might provide much more in-depth insights into this area of

cultural identity and into the difficulties of settling in a new country and culture.

Discussion

The results were analysed in a thematic chart, which allows qualitative answers to be displayed together in a format where patterns between various criteria can be identified. For example, in this case, if there had been a correlation between positive answers and number of generations since the first migration, this could have been identified.

The researcher checked for correlations between positive or negative experiences, answers for questions 6 & 7, current location, percentage of each ethnicity, number of years in Japan/Brazil, which generation of the family migrated first, and which culture the respondent claimed to feel more comfortable in. It was hypothesized that if patterns could be identified, then possible causes and solutions might become apparent. Unfortunately, no apparent correlations could be identified and so it had to be concluded that difficulties for bicultural individuals are different for each individual.

On a more case-by-case basis, many of the answers given by the respondents were brief but some gave more extended explanations of their opinions. This extra information was insightful. One such elaboration was as follows :

“The worst part of being mixed is that you don’t have a ‘right’ national identity. After all, when you are in Japan you are considered Brazilian and when you are in Brazil, people see you as Japanese.”

This individual, despite also mentioning language and racism as key problems, said that they feel comfortable in both Japan and Brazil. This is perhaps indicative

of an innate or learned optimism in regard to biculturalism.

One interpretation that might be made when analyzing the responses was that often respondents mentioned what seem to be rather minor difficulties, such as ‘*The fact that Japanese don’t understand sarcasm*’. This was interpreted by the researcher as meaning that the respondent possibly had not experienced any serious difficulties if this was the only one that came to mind at the time of the survey.

Conclusion

Living as a bicultural individual can be difficult in many cases, perhaps more so in countries such as Japan, which do not have a history of large-scale immigration. As the results of this study have shown, individuals in what seem like similar situations can often have very different experiences, and individuals can deal with the same situations very differently. In addition, individuals on opposite sides of the world from each other in very different environments can encounter similar problems or similar benefits from being bicultural.

Inter-cultural encounters could be much more beneficial if people’s minds were open to the positive aspects of other cultures. More should be done to encourage the realization that two very different cultures undoubtedly have a lot they can learn from each other.

Further, and more robust studies of a similar type to the present one would shed light on experiences of biculturalism and encourage more understanding of the benefits and of the struggles that it involves. It is hoped that through further understanding might come increased acceptance of bicultural individuals.

Suggestions for Further Research

A study with a larger number of respondents in both Brazil in Japan would be very valuable. In addition, the inclusion of questions which probe reasons for, examples of, and possible solutions for the difficulties mentioned would shed more light on the beliefs of respondents and on the systems or lack of systems that are in place to help immigrants in each of these countries.

Of course, studies into cultural identity involving other ethnic groups would also be a valuable addition to the field. Some examples of these might be ; Spanish-speaking Latin Americans in Japan, Japanese in Spanish-speaking Latin American countries, South East Asians in Japan, Japanese in South East Asia, and so on.

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Appendices

Appendix 1 :

Survey questions in English :

- a) Where do you live at the moment ? (country & city)
- b) Please tell me your cultural heritage. For example, I am 75% English and 25% Egyptian.
- c) Which generation of your family first migrated abroad ?
- d) How many years have you lived in Japan / in your other country ?
- e) Where do you feel most 'at home' (if anywhere) ?
- f) What problems did you have adjusting to the new country (if you moved) ?
- g) What aspects of the two cultures do you feel are the most different / difficult to deal with ?

Appendix 2 :

Explanation & survey questions in Portuguese :

Identidade Cultural de Brasileiros Japoneses

Por favor responda as seguintes questões :

Eu estou conduzindo um estudo sobre a identidade cultural de pessoas com nacionalidade mista cuja estas são metade ou parcialmente Japonesas. Eu também estou interessado em pessoas que migraram para o Japão de outros países. Eu espero que essa pesquisa ajude a encorajar a compreensão intercultural e que exponha alguma das dificuldades de viver ou crescer dentro de um ambiente multicultural.

- 1. Aonde você vive no momento ? (País & Cidade)
- 2. Qual a sua herança cultural ? Por exemplo, eu sou 75% Inglês e 25% Egípcio.
- 3. Qual geração da sua família que foi a primeira a se mudar para o exterior ?
- 4. Há quantos anos você viveu no Japão e quantos anos no seu país de origem ?
- 5. Em qual cultura você se sente mais confortável (caso tenha alguma) ?
- 6. Quais problemas você enfrentou para se ajustar no país novo (se você se mudou) ?
- 7. Quais aspectos das duas culturas você sente que são diferentes/difíceis de se lidar ?

Appendix 3 :

Respondent's answers for questions 1-4 displayed in a thematic chart. Questions 5-7 are displayed below.

1. Where do you live at the moment ?	2. Please tell me your cultural heritage. For example, I am 75% English and 25% Egyptian.	3. Which generation of your family first migrated abroad ?	4. How many years have you lived in Japan / in your other country ?
Japan, Toyohashi City	75% Japanese and 25% Brazilian	Other : great-grandparents	Japan : 21 years. Country of origin : 3 years.
Brazil, Guarulhos City	75% Japanese and 25% Brazilian	My parents	Japan : 22 years. Country of origin : 1 year and a half.
Japan, Hamamatsu City	25% African, 25% Japanese, 25% Portuguese and 25% German	Other : Uncle	Japan : 15 years. Country of origin (Brazil) : 25 years.
Japan, Iwata City	50% Japanese, 25% Italian and 25% Brazilian	My parents	Japan : 15 years. Country of origin : 6 years.
Japan, Hamamatsu City	100% Japanese	My grandparents	Japan : 15 years. Country of origin (Brazil) : 17 years.
Japan, Iwata City	50% Japanese and 50% European (Serbian)	My parents	Japan : 9 years Country of origin (Brazil) : 10 years
Japan, Hamamatsu City	Italian, Japanese, Indigenous, and Spanish (they didn't write the percentage)	My grandparents	Japan : 14 years. Country of origin : 13 years.
Japan, Hamamatsu City	75% Japanese and 25% Italian	My parents	Japan : 21 years (since birth)
Brazil, Sao Paulo City	Japanese	My grandparents	Japan : 2 years Country of origin : 21 years
Brazil, Sao Paulo City	Brazilian and Japanese	My great-grandparents	Japan : 6 years Country of origin (Brazil) : 26 years
Brazil, Sao Paulo City	50% Japanese 50% Brazilian	My parents	Japan : 5 years Country of origin : 26 years

Japan, Okazaki City	Japanese	My parents	Japan : 6 years Country of origin : 17 years
Brazil, Sorocaba City	25% Italian 25% German 25% Japanese 25% Native Brazilian (indigenous)	My grandparents	I lived in Japan for 8 months and I'm living in Brazil ever since.
Brazil, Sao Paulo City	60% Japanese 40% Brazilian	My grandparents	Japan : None Country of origin (Brazil) : 25 years
Brazil, Sao Paulo City	Japanese	My grandparents	Japan : 3 months Country of origin : 23 anos
Japan, Nakatsugawa City	70% Japanese 30% Portuguese	My parents	Japan : 3 (they didn't write specifically)
Brazil, Sao Paulo City	Japanese	My grandparents	Japan : 5 years Country of origin : 22 years
Brazil, Sao Paulo City	75% Japanese 25% Brazilian	My grandparents	Japan : 0 Country of origin : Ever since

5. Where do you feel most 'at home' (if anywhere) ?
- Australia
6. What problems did you have adjusting to the new country (if you moved) ?
7. What aspects of the two cultures do you feel are the most different / difficult to deal with ?
- Prejudice against my nationality, problems with getting jobs, problems when signing contracts in general. Education and mores.

Both cultures	Difficulties in learning the language and racism	Being a Japanese and a Brazilian mixed person is complicated because both cultures are extremely the opposite (different). In Brazil, you have this warmth from people, a joy completely different from that in Japan. Now in Japan, everything is more organized. The people are cold but respectful, and at the same time, polite. The worst part of being mixed is that you don't have a "right" national identity. After all, when you are in Japan you are considered Brazilian and when you are in Brazil, people see you as Japanese.
Brazilian	None at all	The Japanese culture is more "quiet", calm! The Brazilian is more "noisy", festive!
Japanese	The cuisine	Hierarchy
Japanese	The language	The fact that Japanese don't understand sarcasm.
Japanese	The country's language	A part of the culture is a little hard to deal with. Mostly because they (the Japanese) are not as warm as the Brazilians.
Brazilian	The language and the mores.	The mores.
Brazilian	None, because I live in Japan since birth and didn't feel any difficulties to adapt.	The Japanese are very conservative and it's difficult to make friends with them. The manners (rules) are really different.
Brazilian	When I moved to Japan, I was bullied a lot for not knowing Japanese.	None
Japan	In Brazil, the lack of teaching the principles of Japan like honor, ethic and morality.	Principles taught in childhood of both cultures are very different and it's because of that people who goes out of Brazil and go to Japan does bad things, and the Japanese people who goes to Brazil suffers with the Brazilian education.
Brazilian	The language	The Brazilian way of being and the Japanese methodic way.
Japanese	At the beginning, the language.	The Brazilian.

I have things that I love in both cultures. However in both cultures there also things that bothers me. Sometimes I think I don't fit in neither one.	A lot of racism and a lot of fetishism.	The lack of communication and the submission of the women in Japan (In Brazil this is also a problem but it's not in the same proportion) is absurd and scares me a lot.
Respondent skipped this question	Respondent skipped this question	Difficulties with the language, respect with the elders and the education.
Japanese	In Brasil there's a huge problem of acceptance and interaction between the oriental culture and the occidental culture (like respect, for example). In Japan, I had problems with my tattoos and with the fact I was Brazilian.	Values of respect (specially when it involves traditions), gestikulacions and mutual preconceptions (Brazil x Japan).
Respondent skipped this question	Communication	The bad habits of Brazilians / The preconception and the Japanese strong concept of hierarchy.
Japan	The language and the writing.	Discipline and the education.
Japanese	Dealing with imprudent people.	The relationship between people when it comes to manners. The Brazilians hardly have the conservative manners of the Japanese.